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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN-CHECHEN FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY ORDERED LIQUIDATED

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells.
Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (SBU) Russia's Supreme Court on January 23 upheld a lower court ruling ordering the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS) liquidated based on its executive director's earlier conviction for "extremist" activity. The court deliberated for about 30 minutes before announcing its decision. To our knowledge, this is the first NGO ordered liquidated under laws that bar those convicted of extremism from active participation in the leadership or involvement in non-governmental organizations. RCFS Executive Director Stanislav Dmitrievskiy was convicted in February of inciting racial hatred and given a suspended sentence, based on the publication of statements by Chechen separatist leaders in the group's newspaper in 2004.

¶2. (C) Dmitrievskiy told EMBOFF who observed the hearing that the decision was expected. RCFS' work in reporting human rights abuses in Chechnya would continue, via two new NGOs that were recently successfully registered: the Nizhniy Novgorod Foundation for Promoting Tolerance, based in Nizhniy Novgorod, and Tolerance, based in Chechnya. Dmitrievskiy said he and his colleagues would also try to register RCFS in Finland and have already moved the NGO's assets out of Russia to avoid having them seized in Russia.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Dmitrievskiy and his colleagues never made any attempt to conceal his continued involvement with RCFS after his conviction. While acknowledging that RCFS had remained committed to its ideals and worrying about the precedent that a liquidation could set, some of our human rights contacts questioned the wisdom of the path RCFS chose to take, suggesting that liquidation was almost inevitable. In addition to our observer, the European Commission Delegation, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Lithuania, and Portugal sent observers, as well as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. END COMMENT

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